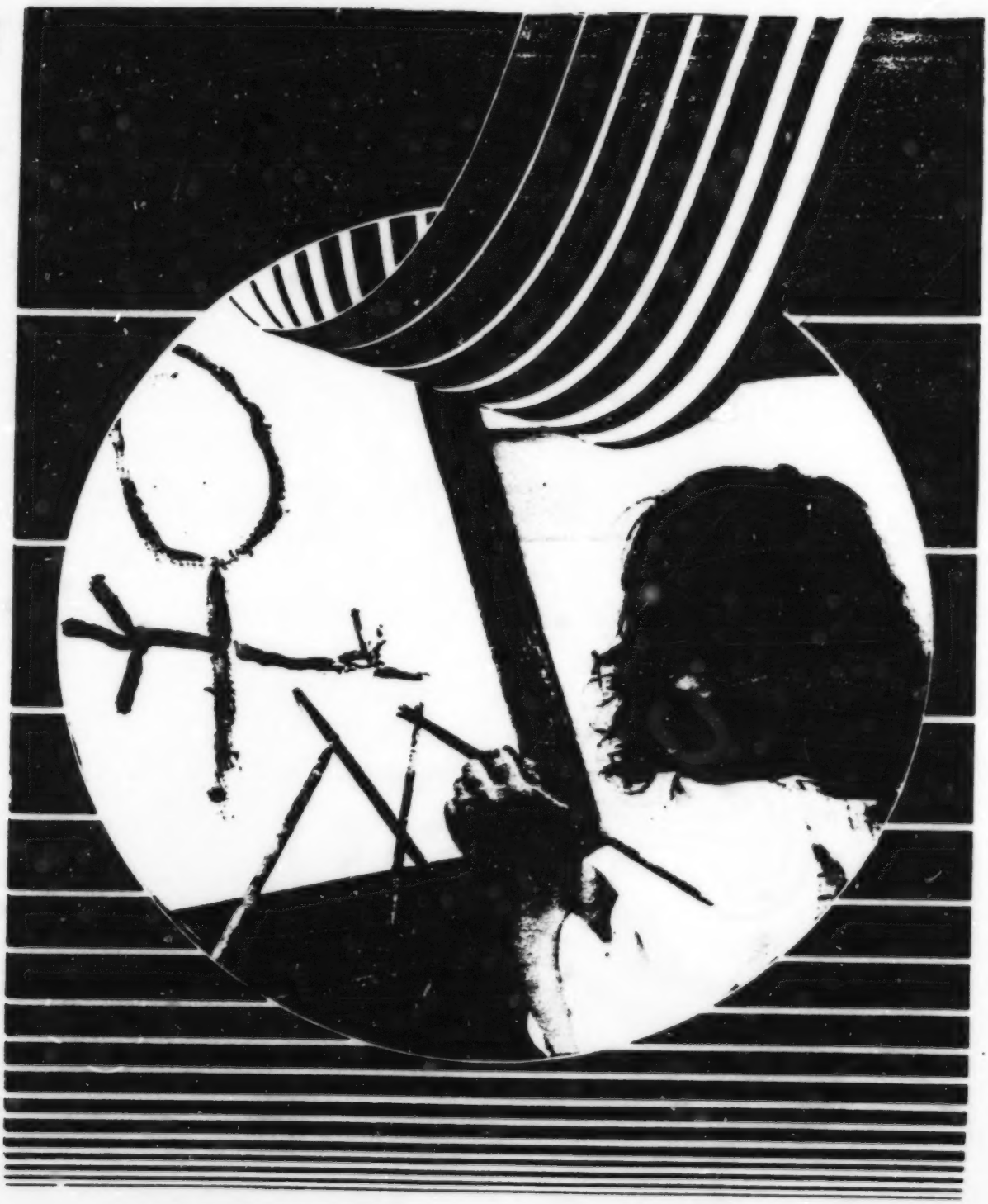
Saskatchewan Education

A Report from the Minister's Advisory Committee on the Education of Gifted Learners

The Education of Gifted Learners in Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan



May, 1984

Discussion Paper

presented to

The Honourable Patricia Smith, Minister of Education

by the

Advisory Committee on the Education of Gifted Learners

May 10, 1984

Committee Members:

Carol Casswell, Regina P.S.D. No.4
Wayne Dahlgren, Sturgis S.D. No.45
Sharon Harris, Oxbow S.D. No.51
Tom Hengen, Regina R.C.S.S.D. No.81
Rita Hlady, Saskatoon S.D. No.13
Margaret Lipp, Regina
Linda Misanchuk, Saskatoon St. Pauls R.C.S.S.D. No.20
Elmer Richert - Chairman
Lynne Saas - Department of Education
Daria Trischuk, Saskatoon S.D. No.13

CONTENTS

Vision.....1

Needs of Gifted Learners.....1

Background.....2

Summary of Recommendations.....5

Details of Recommendations & Rationale.....6

Challenges.....15

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE EDUCATION OF GIFTED LEARNERS

VISION

Saskatchewan as a centre for excellence in education is our vision.

Looking for giftedness in the children of this province is central to this vision. Students with special gifts and talents exist in all ethnic, geographic and socio-economic groups, and represent a valuable, largely untapped natural resource.

"Giftedness represents the potential of the human race. The gifted are the forerunners of humanity's future capabilities." (Silverman,1984)

It is the role of Saskatchewan educators to create a learning environment in which the full potential for contribution to self and to society is realized. The provision of a climate for excellence invites gifted learners to become creative producers of knowledge.

It is to further encourage a climate of excellence that we present this discussion paper.

"Hope is the melody of the future, faith is to dance it." (Alvi)

THE NEEDS OF GIFTED LEARNERS

As a group, gifted children are identifiable by cognitive, affective, and creative-productive characteristics which differ to a significant degree from their peers.

Gifted learners are those who possess a unique set of cognitive, affective and creative-productive characteristics which are demonstrated by developmentally advanced behaviors. (SCEGL,1983)

High levels of curiosity, imagination, originality, risk-taking, judgment, language development and abstraction; a rapid rate of learning; a broad knowledge base; high level thinking skills; and leadership ability are commonly identified characteristics of gifted learners.

Individual gifted children are not equally gifted in all areas, or in all ways, nor do they always actively demonstrate their giftedness.

All children have equal worth but different needs.

Taking into consideration the characteristics of gifted learners and with a view to optimal personal development, school programs should aim to include the following elements:
-differential learning opportunities;
-supportive counselling services to enhance knowledge of self;
-opportunities to interact with both intellectual and social peers;
-opportunities to demonstrate talents to adjudicative audiences;
-access to significant adults who serve as role models in the pursuit of vocational and avocational interests.

BACKGROUND - EDUCATION OF GIFTED LEARNERS IN SASKATCHEWAN

Historically, efforts on behalf of gifted learners have received the interest and support of many groups.

LOCAL BOARDS

When school divisions took the initiative to develop special programs for gifted learners local funding and conviction defined the scope of these services. Based on the work of Samuel Laycock, for example, the Saskatoon Board of Education established classes for Academically Talented students in 1932. This program has continued in an expanded form and represents one of the oldest programs for gifted learners on the North American continent. Other initiatives included; Program Extension for the Academically Gifted of the Regina Public School Board, the Program for the Academically Gifted in the Regina Catholic Schools which were both established in 1978, and the Extended Learning Opportunities Program established by the Saskatoon Catholic School Board in 1980.

Initiatives in a number of other school divisions in the province, such as those in Maidstone, Prince Albert Public and Separate and Melville Separate were discontinued through lack of personnel and financial support. The more recent initiatives and beginnings in Estevan, Buffalo Plains, Saskatoon East, Shaunavon, Yorkdale, Yorkton Separate, Cupar, St. Walburg and Oxbow require nurturance and support in order to continue.

PARENTS

Within Saskatchewan's recent past, parent groups have been organized to review and actively promote services which focus on developing the potential of gifted children. Examples of these advocacy groups include the Saskatoon Association for Gifted Children (1979), the Regina Association for Gifted Children (1980), and the Parkland Association for Gifted Education (1982).

SASKATCHEWAN TEACHERS' FEDERATION

Developments within the professional education community were stimulated by The First Saskatchewan Conference on the Education of Gifted Learners held at Fort Qu'Appelle in May of 1982. This conference, jointly sponsored by Saskatchewan Education, Saskatchewan School Trustees Association, Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, the University of Regina and the University of Saskatchewan, resulted in the organization of the Saskatchewan Council for the Education of Gifted Learners (SCEGL), recognized in October of 1983 as a special subject council of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation.

"...Networking enpowers the individual, and people in networks tend to nurture one another." (Naisbitt, 1982)

UNIVERSITIES

Coursework in the education of gifted learners at the provincial universities has been limited; however, some new classes at the University of Regina offer promise for further development.

Similarly, at their 1983 convention, the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association supported a resolution requesting funding for appropriate educational opportunities for gifted learners.

SASKATCHEWAN SCHOOL TRUSTEES ASSOCIATION

After the passage of enabling legislation (Saskatchewan School Act, 1978, Section 185) and in response to continued concern from parents and educators, Saskatchewan Education sponsored hearings to elicit reactions prior to the creation of a policy document regarding the education of gifted learners.

SASKATCHEWAN EDUCATION

Since the publication of the policy document and definition in 1981, school divisions across the province are requesting assistance with the development of school-based programs. Saskatchewan Education has responded by developing inservice materials, training regional and local workshop leaders, and funding the services of a provincial consultant for the 1983-84 school year.

Gifted learners are defined by the Saskatchewan Department of Education 1981 Policy as being those students who "have demon strated high performance or show potential in one of the following areas: specific academic aptitude, reasoning and divergent thinking, visual or performing arts, psychomoto ability".

In December of 1983 the Minister of Education convened the Advisory Committee on the Education of Gifted Learners. The members met to review research, related literature, and legislation. In their deliberations the committee made every effort to account for the variety of issues and perspectives that are associated with the design of a provincial plan for the education of gifted learners.

The following recommendations are presented with unanimous conviction.

"...A man's reach must exceed his grasp or what's a heaven for." (Browning)

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MINISTER'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE EDUCATION OF GIFTED LEARNERS

1) The provision of consultative services to enhance local initiatives;

2) the establishment of a Reference Group as a resource to Saskatchewan Education;

3) the further development of an approach to teacher education which recognizes a variety of learning opportunities within the university and beyond;

4) the development of an effective network of resources within other governmental departments and the community to meet the needs of gifted learners;

5) the support and expansion of outlets for the talent of gifted learners;

6) the provision of funding for personnel resources to develop and implement differential programming for gifted learners;

7) the review of existing policies and practices relating to continuous progress, individualized instruction, and alternative education as appropriate to the needs of gifted learners;

8) and the development of a plan for incremental implementation of services for gifted learners.

RECOMMENDATION NUMBER 1

The provision of consultative services to enhance local initiatives.

DETAILS:

The consultative services would include:

a) a team of resource people with expertise in education of the gifted learner, retained by Saskatchewan Education to:

   i) assess professional and programming needs;

   ii) identify individuals possessing knowledge and expertise in the education of gifted learners;

   iii) establish a climate for sharing knowledge and expertise;

b) flexible response teams seconded to address specific inservice requests from local jurisdictions.

RATIONALE:

To provide a philosophical and organizational unity for initiatives in the education of gifted learners in Saskatchewan.

To coordinate initiatives.

To provide a focus for networking and leadership from a provincial perspective.

To support leadership and to provide program resources which are sensitive to the unique needs of the students and teachers at the community level.

To ensure programs appropriate to community audiences and resources.

To build on the unique resources of a community.

RECOMMENDATION NUMBER 2

The establishment of a Reference Group as a resource to Saskatchewan Education.

DETAILS:

The Reference Group would perform a liaison function in regard to policy and planning in the following ways:

a) To serve as a continuing resource for an informed perspective in current issues, trends, and needs.

b) Suggest criteria for evaluation of programs.

c) Suggest criteria and/or guidelines for recognition of:

   i) specialist teacher certification;

   ii) specialized courses and differentiated credit at the secondary level.

RATIONALE:

To provide a mechanism for renewal.

To achieve a broad ownership of initiatives.

RECOMMENDATION NUMBER 3

The further development of an approach to teacher education which recognizes a variety of learning opportunities within the university and beyond.

DETAILS:	RATIONALE:
Such an approach to teacher education would necessitate that Saskatchewan Education:	
a) encourage the universities to:	To provide teachers with access to the specific body of knowledge which relates to the needs of gifted learners and to the approaches which mee these needs.
i) integrate the education of gifted learners into all education courses;	
ii) provide a complement of courses which would lead to specialization in education of gifted learners;	To develop teachers equipped to look for and to respond to giftedness.
iii) allow flexible credit for a variety of learning experiences;	To provide professional status and increased credibility for educators.
b) encourage and recognize a range of professional development opportunities for teachers;	To encourage and recognize professional commitment to the education of gifted learners.
c) establish a system of endorsements for teachers of gifted learners which recognizes the validity of a variety of learning situations;	To enable teachers working with gifted learners to engage in a range of experiences and to explore and to experiment with promising practices.
d) make provisions for secondment and release time to enable:	
i) teacher exchanges;	
ii) internships.	

RECOMMENDATION NUMBER 4

The development of an effective network of resources within other governmental departments and within the community to meet the needs of gifted learners.

DETAILS:

Saskatchewan Education would initiate liaison with other governmental departments and non-governmental agencies to engage new resources which would extend learning opportunities for gifted learners.

Such opportunities could include:
- -distance education;
- -professional mentorships;
- -career explorations in professions, business and industry;
- -community service options.

RATIONALE:

To contribute to a new policy environment for learning.

To encourage the sharing of responsibilities, costs and benefits among Education, other government agencies, and the private sector.

RECOMMENDATION NUMBER 5

The support and expansion of outlets for talent of gifted learners.

DETAILS:

Saskatchewan Education would support existing and emerging outlets for student's talents.

Such outlets for talent could include:
- -Future Problem Solving Bowl;
- -Olympics of the Mind;
- -regional and provincial Science Fairs;
- -student conferences;
- -children's festivals and exhibitions;
- -student publications;
- -Saskatchewan Talent Search;
- -regional/provincial art fair;
- -Model United Nations;
- -debating and oratorical competitions;
- -drama festivals;
- -model legislative assemblies.

RATIONALE:

To affirm gifted learners in their creative productive efforts.

To promote real audiences for the talents of gifted learners thereby encouraging the contribution of gifted learners to society.

RECOMMENDATION NUMBER 6

The provision of funding for personnel resources to develop and implement differential programing for gifted learners.

DETAILS:

Saskatchewan Education would fund local personnel resources for:

a) existing and emerging programs for gifted learners;

b) a variety of programming options designed at the local level.

RATIONALE:

To support the appropriate education of gifted learners throughout the province on a secure and continuing basis.

To encourage local programming initiatives.

To encourage growth and renewal within all programs for gifted learners in the province.

To ensure that the final ownership of decisions regarding administrative arrangements, program definitions, identification strategies, and resource development rest with the local school division.

RECOMMENDATION NUMBER 7

The review of existing policies and practices relating to continuous progress, individualized instruction, and alternative education appropriate to the needs of gifted learners.

DETAILS:

Saskatchewan Education would review and develop alternatives within existing school programs. Such alternatives might include:

a) models of acceleration including subject area or grade acceleration, and fast paced instruction;

b) credit for courses designed specifically for gifted learners in secondary schools: mentorship opportunities, independent study, career exploration, peer counselling interdisciplinary curriculum, and process skills;

c) a differentiated credit system for secondary school programs to recognize achievement in streamed courses.

RATIONALE:

To endorse program extension through the use of community resources.

To acknowledge in a non-discriminatory manner qualitative differences in achievement.

To affirm that traditional teaching methods and innovative practices complement each other in the appropriate education of gifted learners.

RECOMMENDATION NUMBER 8

The development of a plan for province-wide incremental implementation of services for gifted learners.

DETAILS:

(See page 14)

RATIONALE:

To ensure that the resources are available to support the implementation.

To respond to the expectations that have been raised.

RECOMMENDATION NUMBER 8

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

	1983-84 Awareness	1984-85 Initiatives	1985-86 Growth	1986-87 Stablization	1987 & Beyond
CONSULTATIVE ASSISTANCE	- one provincial consultant	- team of provincial consultants - cooperatively plan demonstration programs - cooperatively plan guidelines for identification, programming and in-house evaluation	- expanded consultative service - introduction of local resource people (teams) - implement the planned programs - seek interdepartmental outlets of talent	- continuation	- provincial support - network of consultative services
REFERENCE GROUP	- Minister's Advisory Committee	- Reference Group	- continuation	- continuation - a set of provincial regulations and guidelines for gifted learners	- continuous influence on future developments in education for gifted learners
TEACHER TRAINING					
Saskatchewan Education	- Department sponsored awareness-building inservice sessions in 30+school divisions	- response teams seconded to support local professional initiatives	- flexible inservice to meet needs of those who develop and deliver programs	- continuous provision of inservice - upon request	- general acceptance & support by teachers in the field for teacher training programs
Universities	- introductory courses in education of gifted learners - bursary assistance - new classes (advanced)	- flexible credit	- liaison with other disciplines	- specialization in education of gifted learners	- comprehensive graduate & undergraduate offering
Other Settings		- explore the creation of alternative settings for Teacher Education	- continuation	- approved list of education alternatives	- recognition and credit for extended learning
INTERDEPARTMENTAL INITIATIVES	- initiate discussion	- develop plan for interagency cooperation - pilot projects with other government departments	- expansion of projects - inclusion of private sector - initial planning for centres of excellence	- continuation - implement and promote centres of excellence	- Education - a coordinated enterprise for excellence
FUNDING PROVISIONS	- current programs are funded at the discretion of the local boards - funding for provincial consultant	- funding for provincial consultative services - funding for response teams - increased funding for bursaries	- funding for local consultants - financial support for established programs - financial support for all approved new programs - cooperative funding for interdepartmental projects	- financial support for centres of excellence	- continuous financial commitments to programs for gifted learners

CHALLENGES

The challenge facing our students will be to apply their gifts to life in the global community, a community being brought together by necessity, but one which may be guided by the same desire to develop human potential which characterized the early people of Saskatchewan.

Our challenge, as educators, trustees, parents, and citizens of this province is to provide an educational system which will permit our gifted young people to actualize their potential, to meet the expectations of the third millenium.

An invitation is extended to all educators to take up the challenge and to follow the "Directions" which will best enable us to meet the present and future educational needs of gifted learners.